

Councilmember Jane Hague

Spring 2003

# County Report

METROPOLITAN  
KING COUNTY  
COUNCIL  
**DISTRICT 11**

Dear Neighbors,

It's hard to believe that we are now several months into the Year 2003 and will soon be grappling with the next installment of the County's continuing budget crisis. The challenges we faced last year in passing a balanced budget for 2003 were among the toughest of my career.

A \$53M shortfall last year in our \$500M General Fund and the prospect of more to come during the next three years means "business as usual" is a thing of the past. For most of us change comes hard. At King County, however, necessity has become the mother of invention, and we have been down many innovative and unusual paths in our desire to meet our core responsibilities.

Faced with a "perfect storm" of rising mandated costs coupled with decreasing revenues, we have been re-thinking county government in ways that I believe will benefit our citizens and re-establish their trust in local government. We are not willing to simply accept the verdict that some departments and their revenue streams must remain untouched because of state law or designated funding. Rather, we will be vigilant in our search for legal means by which all County government agencies will be required to improve their service delivery and become more efficient.

As we struggled with the huge shortfall during the last six months of 2003, we looked beyond mere cost cutting measures and sought structural solutions that would not only balance our budget but also enhance service delivery to the constituents we serve. We will soon begin to review and address a similar set of challenges for the 2004 County budget. This report is designed to provide you with a brief look at how we are working to re-shape county government to make it more efficient, accountable and responsive to you.

At your service,



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## RE-THINKING KING COUNTY GOVERNMENT

### County government **can** be more efficient, productive and service-oriented

Here are some of the things we are doing:

- **Established the King County Commission on Governance.** This 9-member commission, which will have representatives from education, labor and business, is charged with addressing the projected \$141 million shortfall in our general fund budget faced over a four year period. They will be identify options for change and make recommendations on the provision of current services, funding of those services and the county's governance structure, including the King County Council.

- **Requiring establishment of performance measurements at all levels of county government.** By budget proviso, we have directed that a plan and schedule be developed in early 2003 for implementing a performance measurement system for all departments. This plan must establish performance measurements that are outcome based and quality based. Thus, it will relate directly to the quality and level of service that you, the consumer of government services, receive on a day to day basis.
- **Examining staffing levels in many areas and reviewing layers of management within**

**our departments.** Here again, constituent "customer" service is our top priority and our front-line workers are our most valuable assets. By focusing on service delivery, it should be possible to eliminate one or more layers of management in many county departments.

- **Established an entrepreneurial approach to the County's parks system.** By transferring parks and pools located within cities to those cities, and be implementing fees for services, the County will concentrate on its regional responsibility to operate regional trails and parks, including our wonderful Marymoor Park in Redmond and Big Finn Hill Park outside of Kirkland.

### County government **must** rethink criminal justice without jeopardizing public safety

- Our highest priority will be to continue to seek ways to reduce the need to send people to jail. And, no, we are not going to have criminals loose on our streets. The vast majority of inmates in the county jail spend less than three days in jail and they are there because our courts have nowhere else to send them. We are seeking – and finding – alternatives that

will ensure punishment for serious offenders but permit less expensive options for others, particular those with mental health or substance abuse problems.

- We will also be looking at other ways of controlling jail costs, including health costs and we will

be working hard to identify other efficiencies that may bring savings to our jail operation.

- Our recently passed **Adult Justice Operational Master Plan** will be the basis for our continued search for operational efficiencies and savings within our criminal justice budget.

# CREATING ENTREPRENEURIAL RELATIONSHIPS

## County government **must** find ways to address the structural gap between county revenues and expenditures

- We will be going to the state legislature to talk about mandates from the state that are currently unfunded. We cannot continue to accept state mandated programs that are not accompanied by full funding.
- Planning and staff work for the 2004 budget began before the ink was dry on the 2003 budget. All of our committee's work programs will focus on addressing the structural gap and issues that were unresolved during the 2003 debate.
- We will be looking at staffing levels throughout the County and working hard to find ways to reduce the impact of labor contracts and the rapidly escalating costs associated with wage and benefit packages.

## County government **must** address the disparity between departments with dedicated revenues and those with general funds

- While the Sheriff, Adult Detention, Parks, Human Services and other services have been forced to take millions in cuts, other departments and divisions such as Solid Waste, Wastewater, Transportation, and Natural Resources, are funded by dedicated revenue streams and fees. Thus, they have not had to undergo the intense scrutiny and budget cutting that resulted in park closures and cuts in all of the general fund agencies that enabled us to balance a budget for 2003.
- We are looking for ways to balance this disparity while protecting ratepayers from any raid on fees they pay for specific services.
- Solid Waste (garbage) is a start. In the future, that division will pay \$7 million in annual rent on the Cedar Hills landfill and it will go to the county's general fund to be used for human services or other county services that are in danger of further cuts.
- We've also put a hold on a number of expenditures at the Houghton Transfer Station until the Solid Waste Division has submitted, and the Council has approved, a plan to divert usage from over-capacity stations like Houghton to other underutilized transfer stations in the county.

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## Questionnaire:

As we continue to explore new ways of doing business and seek new approaches to such vital concerns as funding human service programs and keeping our parks open, I would like to hear from you on several key issues that will face the County Council during the coming months. Please let me know if I can provide you with additional information on these issues or visit my web site at [www.metrokc.gov/hague](http://www.metrokc.gov/hague).

1. There is a proposal to decrease the number of Councilmembers from the 13 designated by a Countywide vote in 1992 to a total of nine councilmembers. Currently each Councilmember represents approximately 135,000 constituents. What do you believe would be the appropriate number of representatives on the King County Council:

☐ 13 members    ☐ 9 members    ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_ members  
(fill in number)

2. The Council will be acting on a proposal by the Metropolitan Parks Task Force to send a 5.5 cent property tax levy to the voters. This level of funding would keep open and cover maintenance costs for the County's remaining active and passive regional parks and trails as well as for all of the parks in rural King County. Do you:

☐ favor the levy    ☐ oppose the levy    ☐ different amount

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## Hague applauds creation of public-private partnerships.

*Councilmember Hague welcomes new homeowners to the Greenbrier in Woodinville, an example of the public-private partnerships that can work effectively to provide affordable housing in our region.*



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